

RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

BIBLICAL, PASTORAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITORS

MARIUS J. NEL, DION A. FORSTER & CHRISTO H. THESNAAR



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THE PRAXIS OF RECONCILIATION AMONG RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

A Pastoral Care Approach

Oholiabs D. Tuduks¹

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a multi-religious country has three main religious groups – Christians, Muslims, and the adherents of traditional religions. But the most populous of the three are Christians and Muslims, while the former are found more in the south-east and south-west of the country among the Igbo and Yoruba major ethnic groups, the latter are concentrated more in the north among the Hausa/Fulani² major ethnic group. Impliedly, in Northern Nigeria Christians constitute the minority who comes from the minority ethnic groups and a meagre number from the Hausa/Fulani major ethnic group. The two religious groups live together in the same communities with some families having mix-religious adherents as a result of inter-marriages and or proselytisation. But despite this togetherness, Christians and Muslims continue to experience inter-religious tension.

Historically, Northern Nigeria is known for its periodic religious crises which has caused a lot of havoc among the Christians and Muslims in the region. Research has shown that Northern Nigeria has been under religious crises from 1980 to the present and this has claimed numerous lives including destruction of properties (Best, 2001; cf. Sodiq, 2009; Sampson, 2012; Adegbulu, 2013; Mulders, 2016). The religious crises can be divided into two different stages: the early stage (1980 to 2008), and the late stage (2009 to present). The major divide of these stages was the advent of a dreaded Islamic group popularly known as *Boko Haram*³ in 2009. The early stage originated with a religious attack by a group known as the Maitatsine⁴ (1980 to 1985) who caused

- 1 Rev Oholiabs D. Tuduks is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), as well as a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at Gombe State University, Nigeria. He is currently a PhD candidate at Stellenbosch University.
- 2 Hausa/Fulani were two different ethnic groups before the colonial era, but later became assimilated into one, and known today as Hausa/Fulani ethnic group.
- 3 This is a radical Islamic sect called "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad", but widely known as *Boko Haram*. The word *Boko* in Hausa is an equivocal term which means either 'western' or 'foreign'; while *Haram* is an Arabic derivative meaning 'forbidden'. Therefore, the two words put together means 'to forbid anything that is western and western education' (Adegbulu, 2013).
- 4 The Islamic group was nicknamed after the name of the leader – 'Maitatsine' (Ibighbi, 1987).

serious harm among the two religious groups but more especially the Christians. By 1987 there were inter-religious crises as the results of religious intolerance, religious solidarity, and alleged blasphemy which continued periodically to 2008 while claiming the lives of many of these religious groups. The late stage from 2009 to the present started with the emergence of the *Boko Haram* whose activities are no longer news in Northern Nigeria today. It is worth noting that the crises in the early and late stages include religious attack and inter-religious crises. And in the case of religious attack where Christians⁵ are made the target, Muslims⁶ are not totally exempted particularly with the current *Boko Haram* attacks. The effect of these religious attack and inter-religious crises trigger the practice of dysfunctional exclusion⁷ among the two religious groups as will be discussed in the next section.

Nonetheless, according to Yusufu Turaki, the dysfunctional exclusion and the religious crises experienced today in Northern Nigeria originated in the British colonial era when religious intolerance and prejudice between the Muslims and non-Muslims were encouraged (Turaki, 1993). This assertion was affirmed by the report on the inter-religious crises in Nigeria by the International Joint Delegation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2012). The reports explained the dysfunctional exclusion in the geographical polarisation of Muslims and Christians, where Christian residential areas, and in some cases local markets, are segregated from those of Muslims. It is this situation of exclusion that results in the dysfunctional relationship where the practice of exclusion and marginalisation of the minority religious group becomes a common practice in Northern Nigeria. And these practices continue to trigger religious tension leading to violence among the religious groups. As a result of these practices the adherents of the two religions do not trust one another or each other as group, they rather live with concealed anger, yet with fear of one another. Several attempts have been made by different peace brokers to address the challenges through inter-religious dialogue and by means of religious tolerance, yet the two religious groups continue to live in a dysfunctional relationship that triggers religious tension.

In view of the introduction above, this chapter will reconsider the praxis of reconciliation among the two religious groups in addressing the dysfunctional relationship and inter-religious crises in Northern Nigeria. It will first examine the

5 Sodiq (2009:669) further states, "Whenever any sect of modern revivalism of Islam attacks Westerners or denounces modern materialism, these movements always assume that Christians are agents of the West; therefore, Christians are directly or indirectly seen as agents of oppression against Islam and Muslims." This might be the reason why some Muslims attacked Christians and their places of worship.

6 Bitrus (2016) argues that the involvement of Muslims in *Boko Haram's* attack is designed to blindfold the public from perceiving the reality of the *Boko Haram's* mission against the Christians. And, on the other hand, he explains that Muslims are also attacked because they are perceived as threat to *Boko Haram's* mission and or perceived as collaborators with government to fight against them.

7 Dysfunctional exclusion refers to the practice in a relationship that keeps off an individual or group for one's personal or group interest thus making relationship vulnerable to crisis. In other words, it is an exclusion that causes an impaired relationship thus creating more emotional turmoil than satisfaction (Urell, 2013).

challenge of Christian/Muslim relationship in Northern Nigeria. Secondly, it will reconsider the praxis of reconciliation and its challenges among the two religious groups. And lastly, it will pragmatically approach reconciliation from a pastoral care perspective with an inter-religious consciousness towards promoting Christian/Muslim inter-religious co-existence in Northern Nigeria.

THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN/MUSLIM RELATIONSHIP IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria continued to experience periodic religious crises among themselves. Speaking on the causes of crises, Joseph and Rothfuss (2012) indicates that Christians in Northern Nigeria have been occasionally subjected to mob attacks from followers of the Islamic faith as a result of perceived *provocation*. Gwamna (2010) further argues that the perceived provocations made Christians in Northern Nigeria suffer attacks from their Muslims counterpart. He asserts that some of the crises are so-called *misplaced aggression* for example the Osama Bin Laden riot (2001), the Miss World Pageant crisis (2002) and the Prophet Mohammad Cartoon crisis (2006) which were not perpetrated by Northern Nigerian Christians. In this context, Northern Nigerian Christians were made scapegoats of perceived atrocities of the West who are identified as being Christians (Griswold, 2010). They have thus experienced numerous attacks and killings in response to these alleged blasphemies.⁸

On the other hand, Christians have also complained of blasphemous statements spoken against the person of Jesus Christ by some Muslims. For example, Malam Nasir El-Rufai⁹ who blasphemed on two different occasions about Jesus Christ (Eyoboka, 2016; cf. Erunke, 2013). In response to the blasphemies, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) asserts that it is due to the maturity, fortitude, patience, decency, forgiving nature and deep sense of restraint that the majority of Christians have in Nigeria which prevented them from retaliating against El-Rufai for his blasphemous statements (Erunke, 2013). In regard to the killing of Christians in Northern Nigeria, CAN¹⁰ blames the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for keeping silent (Obi, 2016). Joseph and Rothfuss (2012) have earlier noted that the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has failed in taking action against the perpetrations of evil on the innocent, rather regarded the actions of the mob as being carried out by hoodlums, thereby dismissing the issue. Omotosho (2003) blames the

8 For example, more recently in Niger state, Mr. Methodus Chimaije Emmanuel on 29 May 2016 was killed over alleged blasphemous comments about Prophet Mohammed on the social media (Omonobi, 2016). Mrs Bridget Agbahime was brutally killed in Kano state on 2 June 2016 on the ground of alleged blasphemy against Prophet Mohammed (World Watch Monitor, 2016). And on 22 August 2016 on the account of alleged blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad in Zamfara state, eight were set ablaze in a house to their total annihilation (Nwachukwu, 2016).

9 Malam Nasir El-Rufai is the present Governor of Kaduna state, Nigeria. His administration is believed by many Christians as capable of causing religious crisis in Kaduna state.

10 The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) cited the example of Mrs Eunice Elisha who was killed in Abuja on 9 July 2016 noting that she is not sure whether the killings of Christians bother the President or not (Obi, 2016).

two religious leaders for being responsible for the acts of provocation that triggers religious violence. He cites examples of some of the Christian and Muslim polemics who engaged in provocation, thereby causing violence among the two religious groups. For Omotosho, the major factors responsible for the cause of inter-religious violence are, lack of recognition of one another; campaigns of hatred and blackmail; lack of genuine desire to understand each other's belief and culture; and extremism. He therefore argues that to end religious violence in Nigeria, the government must set up a religious committee who would serve as regulatory body for religious activities and at the same time serve as advisory body to the government (Omotosho, 2003). In assessing the inter-religious bridge-building efforts of peace brokers¹¹ from governmental and non-governmental organisations, Ojo and Lateju (2010) remarks that most of the Nigeria's peace brokers responded to the religious crisis only after its escalation to violence, which made it very difficult to address. They noted that the grassroots where the flame of religious crisis is normally seen are often forgotten in nominating members of the dialogue team. Ojo and Lateju therefore argue for the inclusion of people at grassroots level in the inter-religious dialogue team.

There is also the challenge of confronting the truth among the religious groups when there is an act of perpetration by one group against the other, the perpetrators are hardly ever confronted by their respective religious leaders who would rather choose to remain silent over the perpetration. Consequently, the silence or assuming the position of neutrality, communicates the message of affirmation as alluded in the words of the Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."¹² In this context, Thesnaar (2008) uses the term "offenders" in preference to "perpetrators", as offenders in addition to perpetrators includes direct or indirect supporters. The evilness of injustice implies a commitment to disturb the peaceful coexistence of people in a society and as long as the injustice continue it further implies an act of threat that there will be no peace in the society (Esack, 2002).

THE PRAXIS OF RECONCILIATION AMONG RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

In the event of inter-religious conflict in Northern Nigeria, dialogue and tolerance have often been considered by peace brokers as major tools for reconciliation. Reflecting on the history of inter-religious dialogue in Nigeria, Dopamu (1989) asserts that the first major attempt for introducing the inter-religious discussion was in 1975 by a group called Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR). But according to Sodiq (2009), inter-religious dialogue started in the 1960s with the activities and participation of some Christian and Muslim leaders in inter-religious

11 Such as the Advisory Council on Religious Affairs (ACRA) 1987; Nigeria Inter Religious Council (NIREC) 2000; Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA); Centre for Interfaith Relations and Cross-Cultural Outreach; Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Movement (JPRM); Bridge Builders; West Africa Network for Peace Building; Interfaith Mediation Centre; Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum.

12 See Goodreads, *Desmond Tutu Quotes*, viewed from <http://bit.ly/2Tl6uWf> [Accessed 19 March 2017].

discussion. Inter-religious dialogue therefore continued with an increasing number of proponents. The 1980s reoccurrence of inter-religious crises between Christians and Muslims, which affected the Northern Nigerian region, prompted the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida to consider inter-religious dialogue as a matter of priority in addressing the crisis. In 1988, General Babangida appointed an advisory council of twenty-four members, comprising twelve Muslims and twelve Christians, to find ways that all religions in Nigeria could live together in harmony. In 1999 when the inter-religious crisis still persisted, the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) was formed through the joint efforts of the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to serve as peace brokers. In the efforts of NIREC, Joseph and Rothfuss (2012) noted the ineffectiveness of the use of dialogue, and therefore argues for reconsideration of their approach. Meanwhile, the International Joint Delegation of the World Council of Churches and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in its report on inter-religious crises in Northern Nigeria identified the ineffective cooperation within NIREC as a key factor behind the inter-religious tensions and crises in Northern Nigeria (The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2012). Therefore, the inter-religious dialogue among Christians and Muslims needs to be assessed to find out the challenges that make it unsuccessful.

The challenge of inter-religious dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue has faced challenges which has made it less effective among the religious groups. It has been observed that the idea of inter-religious dialogue is still a controversial subject in an intra-religious setting. For example, Sodiq (1994), from a Muslim perspective pointed out that the two religious groups are not in congruence on the idea of religious dialogue and its practice. He commended the Christian leaders for their initiative and support for dialogue, but on the other hand, Sodiq (1994) reveals that some Muslims are not in support of dialogue for the following reasons. Firstly, Muslims feel a need for self-sufficiency as they believe that Islam is seen as a system of belief that is completed by Allah, therefore Muslims need nothing outside it to borrow or learn from other religions. Secondly, Muslims resent dialogue thinking that Christians consciously employed various methods of winning them to Christianity and they assume dialogue may be one of these, and therefore were afraid of total engagement. The third reason was the argument that there were fewer Muslim scholars who were knowledgeable enough in Christian thought to engage on an equal level together with Christian scholars in dialogue; by this, they believe, dialogue give Christians an advantage over them, allowing Christian scholars to dominate and control the dialogue table at many conferences.

Arguing against the resentment of some Muslims about dialogue, Omotosho (2003), an Islamic scholar, explains that Muslims believe that Islam has always recognised and practiced genuine dialogue with Christianity right from the inception of Islam, and hold that, on the subject of dialogue they have made giant strides on fundamental issues that are yet to be reciprocated by Christians (Omotosho, 2003). In support of Omotosho, Acar (2005) speaks from the Islamic historical perspective, on the investigatory dialogue between the delegation of the Najran Christians and the

Prophet Muhammad in Medina, which is understood as a successful and peaceful dialogue that concluded with peaceful farewell words “O, Abu al-Qasim, we decided to leave you as you are and you leave us as we are” (Acar, 2005:3). According to Acar, the dialogue ended with a written agreement between the Christians and the Prophet Muhammad about the security of the lives, property and religion of the Christians, and this was signed by witnesses.

It is believed that in the early period in Medina, the inhabitants were largely Christians and Jews, who were known as *people of the Book* and with whom the Muslims had cordial relationship and that they invited them for dialogue (Omotosho, 2003). This interest in dialogue is inscribed in the Qur’an: “Say O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between you and us that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not from among ourselves Lords and patrons other than God ...” (Qur’an 3:64). Such dialogue suggests the interest of the Qur’an in inter-religious peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. Despite the fact that the Qur’an reveals that mankind was one community (Qur’an 2:213), which according to Al-Qurtubi (Fazaluddin, 2016) implies oneness of religion. The Qur’an holds to the unity of faith, talking of a common foundation for success between Muslims, Sabians, Jews and Christians who all believe in God, the Judgement Day and the doing of good deeds (Fazaluddin, 2016). Muslims are admonished not to engage in a senseless argument with the people of the Book,¹³ as this would be capable of creating a crisis, for the Christians have the same source of revelation, and the same God whom they all worship (Qur’an 29:46). In another development, Christians are singled out for special respect by Muslims as their affection (Qur’an 5:82). These perspectives serve as motivation to Muslims for peaceful relationship with Christians today.

Other area of challenge to Christian/Muslim inter-religious dialogue is the practice of fundamentalism among some religious leaders. Yakubu Yahya, a Muslim activist noted that if there is any grievance between Muslims and the government, the only place of settlement is not the dialogue table but battlefield. To this view of Yahya, Kwashi asked, if Muslims are prepared to settle grievances with the government only on the battlefield, where else can they settle grievances with Christians? (Kwashi, 2004). Notwithstanding, it is worth noting that this statement of Yakubu Yahya does not necessarily represent the view and opinion of all Muslims in Northern Nigeria. On the other hand, the late Evangelist Paul Gindiri, a renowned Christian preacher of Northern Nigeria has been described as a confrontational preacher who’s preaching lacked diplomacy as he often attacked Muslims (Gaiya, 2004). From these two examples, it is clear that fundamentalism is a challenge to Christian/Muslim coexistence in Northern Nigeria.

13 In the Qur’an and Hadith, the term People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb) is used to refer to followers of certain monotheistic faiths which pre-date the advent of Islam. In particular, it refers to the Christians, Jews, and Sabians. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2Tpf8x> [Accessed 20 August 2019].

Reconsideration of inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance for effective usage

Religious leaders need to understand the concept of inter-religious dialogue and how it should be practiced inter-religiously. It is more than just coming to sit around a table, what is brought to the table and how it is presented matters. Gwamna (2010:174-177) understands inter-religious dialogue and classifies it into four types. *The dialogue of life*, which he explains as relationships at the level of the ordinary, the everyday life of the religious adherents. Second, the *dialogue of discourse* which involves the coming together of different religious adherents in interaction with basic information and ideas on their respective religious beliefs and practices. The third type is the *dialogue of spirituality* which has to do with the totality of the person's religious experience, in meditation, prayer, faith and its expression, and can also be referred to as the *dialogue of the heart*. The fourth one is the *dialogue of action* which refers to dialogue through cooperative joint efforts towards the promotion of human development.

In concurring with Gwamna, Bakker (2014) summarised the four types into the dialogues of life, heart, and mind. He merged Gwamna's second and fourth categories under the dialogue of mind. The categorisation of dialogue into these three crucial places of human activities suggest dialogue as an existential phenomenon which automatically puts dialogue at the disposal of human life. Bartholomew (2010) understands dialogue as the most fundamental experience of life and the most powerful means of communication. He stressed the fact that dialogue promotes knowledge, abolishes fear and prejudice, and broadens horizons. Bartholomew warns that to engage in dialogue is not to undertake arguments against one's opponents in the framework of conflict. But rather dialogue is to be approached in a spirit of love, sincerity, and honesty. In this respect he believes that dialogue implies equality that speaks humility (Bartholomew, 2010). Therefore, with equality and humility dialogue becomes a simple way of life among religious groups that dispels hostility and arrogance. Song (2012) rightly asserts that inter-religious dialogue is possible if people recognise the web of relationships, the inevitable inter-connectedness they already and inevitably participate in. She asserts that when the walls of individuality, or *ego* is broken down something much more powerful takes over—the fount of wisdom and empathy emerge. So, the Golden Rule of *Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you*, naturally comes to the fore with ease and without resistance.

To promote and sanitise inter-religious dialogue at a round table its guideline needs to be respected and adhered to. The *Dialogue Decalogue* formulated in the work of Leonard Swidler (1983) should be upheld: *First Commandment* – The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly. *Second Commandment*: Inter-religious dialogue must be a two-sided project – within each religious community and between religious communities. *Third Commandment*: Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. *Fourth Commandment*: Each participant must assume a similar commitment of complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners. *Fifth*

Commandment: Each participant must define himself. *Sixth Commandment:* Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. *Seventh Commandment:* Dialogue can take place only between equals or *par cum pari* as Vatican II put it. *Eighth Commandment:* Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. *Ninth Commandment:* Persons entering into inter-religious dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious traditions. *Tenth Commandment:* Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion from within. If religious leaders or dialogue participants are guided by these *Dialogue Decalogue* it will increase the chances of realising a successful inter-religious dialogue result. Furthermore, the four theses of Paul F. Knitter (2012) serves as a caution as it explains the power of religion in conflict resolution or escalation. His first thesis argues that, unless the religions become part of the solutions, they will certainly continue to be part of the problem. The second thesis is formulated on the grounds that the causes of religious violence can be likened to bad breath, which requires other people to conscientise you. Therefore, the thesis argues for the need of religions to become part of the solution together, and not separately. The third thesis states that, to become part of the solution, religions must confront the reason for being part of the problem. The fourth thesis asserts that one of the reasons why religions are easily exploited for the purposes of violence and hatred is because each religion makes exclusivist claims. Knitter's theses explain the need for inter-religious understanding that helps in the practice of inter-religious dialogue and religious tolerance.

For religious tolerance to be proclaimed among religious adherents, its concept needs to be understood. Thomas Jefferson's understanding of tolerance is *bearing with or suffering*. This supports the Oxford English Dictionary that defines tolerance as to endure, or to sustain pain or hardship, without interference or molestation. The tolerant person "suffers" or "endures" or "bears with" precisely by restraining rather than releasing the impulse to punish or muzzle the opponent by violence (Little, 1998). According to Little, a person who is tolerant is open-minded with an interest in diversity, and as found in the dictionary's elegant words, has a *catholicity of spirit*. The *catholicity of spirit* was found in Mother Theresa who in her lifetime committed herself to serving humanity regardless of their religious affiliations (Wuthnow, 2005:3). In living her Christian religious life inter-religiously Mother Theresa proclaimed *I see God in every human being* (Wuthnow, 2005:1). This is the kind of mind-set that gives birth to the practice of tolerance. In describing the feature of tolerance Potgieter et al. (2014) identified one as ethical behaviour, explaining that a person who is tolerant believes that people in a community benefits when different lifestyles are allowed to flourish as they represent the experience of diversity where much can be learned to better the human condition. They believe that the ability to allow, to permit, to comply, and to forbear constitutes a form of tolerance enjoyed in a community as the people have and exercise the right of living their own lives. Tolerance implies that we are made to be different (Potgieter, van der Walt, & Wolhuter, 2014). Difference must be appreciated for its ability to make us develop desire for something we do not have. The Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu says, "Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realise our

need of one another.”¹⁴ For tolerance to find a fertile ground for flourishing among the adherents of the two religious groups there is a need for an accurate knowledge of the beliefs and practices of Christians and Muslims (Azumah, 2008). Tolerance makes more sense when there is an understanding of what one is to tolerate. This calls for inter-religious understanding among the religious groups.

The following examples of centres and individuals who are committed to promoting inter-religious discussion show that inter-religious understanding is feasible. The efforts of Pastor James Wuye and the Imam Muhammad Ashafa, who are popularly known as *the pastor and the Imam*, are acknowledged often in the promotion of inter-religious understanding. In the past, the two religious leaders were enemies, religious fundamentalists, but today they are partners heading an organisation together called Interfaith Mediation Centre in Kaduna, the north-western part of Nigeria. Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa are passionately engaged in creating awareness for an inter-religious understanding towards peaceful co-existence and healing of the wounded relationship among the Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria (Sennott, 2014). The example of these men is a motivation for inter-religious understanding towards peaceful coexistence, or as the archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, calls it *a model for Christian Muslim relations* (Henderson, 2015:1).

The Da’wah¹⁵ Institute of Nigeria (DIN) of the Islamic Education Trust in Minna, the north-central part of Nigeria is committed to both intra and inter-religious awareness on inter-religious understanding. The awareness is crucial for the fact that Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria have limited inter-religious understanding. Again, DIN believes that *bad people* who are always involved in the act of perpetrating violence are found in both the religions thus the need for inter-religious understanding (Da’wah Institute of Nigeria, 2009). Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama has also been pictured as another example of an inclusive faith leader who engages in inter-religious discussion aiming at fostering the peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. In his efforts to address the divide between the two religious groups in Jos, where in some communities, the two religious groups live in exclusion, the Archbishop engages in organising training and inter-religious discussions aimed at creating an inclusive functional coexistence (Verwoerd, 2015). For this reason, he established an inter-religious centre in the north-central part of Nigeria known as *Jos Interfaith Centre* where inter-religious training and dialogue are conducted.

Another example of a discussion that promotes inter-religious understanding is the nonviolence approach to reconciliation among Christians and Muslims passionately embarked on by Rev. Abare Yunusa Kallah, the chairman of The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) – North-eastern zone. Rev. Kallah engages in organising and conducting trainings and seminars among religious leaders promoting nonviolence, peace and dialogue engagement (Kallah, 2015). He was motivated by his leadership

14 See Goodreads, *Desmond Tutu Quotes*. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2TI6uWf> [Accessed 19 March 2017].

15 *Da’wah* is an Arabic word which means to invite or summon someone. This term is often used to describe when Muslims share their faith with others, in order to teach them more about Islam. This definition is provided by Thoughtco. Viewed from <http://bit.ly/2TmTKpb> [Accessed 16 March 2017].

experience where he discovered the possibility of engaging in inter-religious discussion among Christian and Muslim leaders to develop a nonviolence approach to reconciliation. These examples serve as motivation for a pastoral care approach through inter-religious learning and understanding among the religious groups.

A PASTORAL CARE APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION AMONG RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Pastoral care is not a biblical concept, it stems from the ancient Greek use of *soul care* (Louw, 1998). Nonetheless, the concept gained acceptance within the Christian tradition but over the course of time it developed new meanings. For example, the orthodox approach to *pastoral care* regards it as a process of learning towards an understanding and insight into ecclesiastical doctrine; the reformed tradition considered the concept towards the purification and sanctification of human life through relationship with Christ (Louw, 1998). Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) defines pastoral care as activities of help done by representative Christian persons directed to heal, to sustain, to guide, and to reconcile the persons in trouble. They emphasised that pastoral care is a ministry to be performed by persons of Christian faith not necessarily a pastor or any church leadership person. Clebsch and Jaekle (1964) believe that pastoral care requires Christian faith resources. History might show that people from different disciplines and religions were involved in soul care but that does not make their activities pastoral care. The definition of pastoral care by Clebsch and Jaekle is crucial, where emphasis is placed on Christian faith. In this context, the role of pastoral care can further be summarised into three dimensions: faith care (*cura animarum*) – theological dimension; life care (*cura vitae*) – therapeutic dimension; and victorious resurrection care (hope care) – spiritual dimension (Louw, 2008). The practice of pastoral care expresses a deep concern for human beings without discrimination (Lartey, 2003). It engages in the affairs of human suffering, creating an environment that makes people live in hope with human dignity in the face of their sufferings (Louw, 2008). The functions of pastoral care include healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating, and empowering Lartey (2003). Louw (2008) added the act of interpreting to Lartey's list. These functions are aimed at improving both spiritual and physical maturity (Louw, 2008).

In his book *Pastoral Care to Muslims: Building Bridges*, Kirkwood (2002) differentiates between pastoral care and Christian pastoral care. He explains the latter as having a Christian dimension, sustained by Christian faith; while he understands the former as care provided to the needy by anyone and thus not necessarily by a Christian. Kirkwood (2002) specifically mentions the possibility of pastoral care being offered by a Muslim to a Christian, a Buddhist to a Christian, and a Hindu to a Christian or vice versa. He emphasises that pastoral care is a responsibility of anyone who is in position and has the spiritual sensor, is obliged to render pastoral care unconditionally. In describing the responsibilities of pastoral care giver, Lartey (2003) outlined its model as therapy, ministry,¹⁶ social action, empowerment, and personal interaction. According to these outlined models and the functions described

16 The ministry includes proclamation, teaching, prophecy, service, and worship.

by Lartey and Louw, pastoral care will hardly be the responsibility of everyone. I therefore reaffirm the definition of pastoral care by Clebsch and Jaekle that makes pastoral care a unique Christian responsibility, in contrast to the view of Kirkwood. And as a Christian responsibility, the service is believed to be non-discriminatory focusing on all human beings and their sufferings. A motivating factor for pastoral care, that makes it a Christian service, is the inclusive ministry of Jesus Christ in which the functions of pastoral care are evident in His earthly ministry.

It is worth noting that for pastoral care to be effective there is a need for a hermeneutical approach that explains the process of practicing the functions of pastoral care. According to Louw (1998), hermeneutics involves the process of interpretation where the pastoral care giver operates between the text of the scripture and the context of people (Louw, 1998). The main focus of hermeneutics is the explanation, translation, communication, and interpretation of a message to people who are prepared to hear and understand (Louw, 1998).

In commenting on the hermeneutical characteristics of pastoral interpretation Preston (1977) mentions three phenomena that are frequent in pastoral care: the self of the pastor as interpreter; the uniqueness of every caring situation; and the mutual development of understanding. He added a fourth phenomenon which he describes as having much in common with the traditional hermeneutic endeavour – concerning a time perspective. This has to do with the relative emphasis upon past, present, and future as it illuminates the meanings within the interpretation. In pastoral care the interest is on *human wholeness* according to Louw, with *cura vitae* is meant life should be healed. He explains that in Christian spirituality healing is not merely of a private human soul detached from the body, the existential realities, and the environment; healing is a comprehensive concept (Louw, 2013). Thesnaar (2011) asserts that the hermeneutical process is a deeply transformative process. He states the goal of pastoral care as the understanding of the encounter between God and humans from the perspective of the confronting effect of the grace of God, presence and identifying with the human need and suffering. It should be made clear that within the hermeneutical paradigm, both the perpetrators and victims are in need of healing and wholeness because both have been affected and therefore needs healing that restores their relationships (Thesnaar, 2011).

Towards effective healing, remembrance constitute a part of the reconciliation processes which is often overlooked, or intentionally rejected, by some peace brokers in fear of triggering a crisis. For the present and future to be protected the past need to be remembered. Søren Kierkegaard rightly says, “Those who cannot remember from the past are condemned to repeat it. Life can only be understood backward but must be lived forward” (quoted in Thesnaar, 2011:6). For healing and reconciliation to be effective, pastoral hermeneutics must critically engage with the past in order to transform it in the present and the future (Thesnaar, 2013). Story-telling is the way to the past, the perpetrators and the victims become part of each other’s story; telling it gives a sense of acceptance, respect, and care.

And in telling the stories the following must be confessed, *what we have done; what was done to us; and what we failed to do* (Thesnaar, 2011:30). Stories that are sincerely told prepares the ground for healing and reconciliation.

Thesnaar (2003) provides a helpful process towards a meaningful reconciliation, the first step is for the offender to realise that an offence has been committed. The second has to do with a remorseful confession of the offender to the victim. Thirdly, there must be a willingness for reparation, restoration and restitution by the offender. The last step is an expression of the victim's willingness to forgive. Thesnaar's steps to reconciliation concurs with that of Howard J. Clinebell (1966), an early expert in pastoral care and counselling, whose process includes confrontation, confession, forgiveness, restitution, and reconciliation. Clinebell's main emphasis is on the importance of confrontation, where the core truth is supposed to be unveiled. The idea of confrontation in conflict resolution is likened to the idiom of *calling a spade a spade*. According to Clinebell, sometimes guilt is hidden from both parties, and for it to be resolved, the truth about it needs confrontation. In conflict resolution when the truth is not confronted, peace brokers will only be scratching to the pain of the victim's wound. In the context of healing and reconciliation among religious groups, and confrontation of truth, a pastoral care approach needs an inter-religious consciousness.

Inter-religious pastoral care approach to reconciliation

In promoting religious plurality, Bowden (2005) suggests the need for openness, mutual understanding and respect for one another's truth among the adherents of religions. According to Barnes (2002), the *context of otherness* discloses the *possibility of God*, as God is already working through his Spirit in the *context of otherness*. He urges Christians not to look at their calling only to speak about God that has been revealed through Jesus Christ, but also to critically listen with generosity to what others are saying about God (Barnes, 2002). Knitter (2011) agrees with Barnes, and affirms the terminology of Tillich, that if in Christian theology Christians want to explore more about *God beyond God* than what they have discovered in Jesus Christ, then there is need to turn and give listening ears to the experience and teachings of other religions. He adds that Christian theology is not complete without making an effort to explore beyond the confines of the Christian boundary, because the God who is beyond God is beyond all boundaries. In other words, this God is the boundary, the circle that holds everyone (Knitter, 2011). Knowing about other religions will help Christians to appreciate their unique religion (Knitter, 2011). In stressing Tillich's theology, who was involved in exploring other religious traditions, Knitter asserts that religious diversity is God's will. He explains that, if religious diversity is what it is supposed to be, then the existence of people religiously should be done with consciousness and in co-existence with the other religious people in different ways from theirs. In a language that is more contemporary theological, Knitter (2011:118) states, "To be religious today is to be religious inter-religiously." Wuthnow (2005) points to the example of Mother Teresa, who lived her Christian religious life inter-religiously. The true testimony of her inter-religious ministry was seen by the attendance of her funeral service, where representatives from the world's major religions, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, were represented.

To promote religious life of adherents inter-religiously, I will argue for inter-religious hospitality among Christians and Muslims. According to Cornille (2011), the notion of hospitality entails the recognition of the other different from one's self who is welcomed in spite of fundamental differences in beliefs and practices. In such an atmosphere, friendship and trust are created among the guest and the host so that tolerance produces constructive engagements in those differences. He discussed inter-religious hospitality in three different categories: hospitality at home; ritual hospitality; and doctrinal hospitality. The type of inter-religious hospitality that I am arguing for is the hospitality at home which involves the act of welcoming the adherents of other religions and receiving them into one's home. Cornille (2011) explains that it is in sharing such a meal and home space that opportunity is created between the guest and the host for a more intimate understanding concerning the faith of each other. Inter-religious hospitality will potentially find acceptance among the religious groups as the concept of hospitality is not strange. From a Christian perspective, Hederman (2011) asserts, with two scriptural examples, the implication for hospitality. He observed that sometimes hospitality explains reasons of enlightened self-interest as depicted in Hebrew 13:2 (do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it). Again, hospitality could sometimes be a means of entering into everlasting life as explained in Matthew 25:31-46, "... come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in ..." These texts are believed to serve as motivations for Christians' participation in the practice of hospitality. On the other hand, practicing hospitality from an Islamic perspective is also a strongly held value, it was believed to have been practiced by the Prophet Mohammad and commanded of every Muslim to practice. Prophet Mohammad explained faith in connection to hospitality in terms of giving someone food and exchanging greetings, concluding that good is not found in one who is not hospitable (Lumbard, 2011). According to Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (2009), the Prophet Mohammad welcomed and hosted about sixty Christian delegates from Najran who ate, slept, and even prayed in the Muslim's Mosque in Madinah. Therefore, to visit and host non-Muslims is not only permitted, but encouraged (Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, 2009).

As part of the promotion of inter-religious understanding and tolerance among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, I want to stress the need for a continuous *multi-religious prayer* at events. In his argument for *inter-religious prayer* instead, Gavin D'Costa (2000) distinguished it from multi-religious prayer. He describes the former as an occasion where people from various religious groups plan, prepare, and participate in prayers that the attendants can or may claim as their prayers. D'Costa describes *multi-religious prayers* as a meeting where the religious groups represented are given opportunity to pray or make contribution in relation to an agreed subject. D'Costa (2000) acknowledges the fact that *inter-religious prayer* is seen by others as marital infidelity as the prayers involve communities that are not theirs, who do not profess the same faith as they, and who pray to gods different from theirs. Meanwhile in Northern Nigeria, it is *multi-religious prayer* that is practiced,

but partially. The practice of *multi-religious prayer* will make the two religious groups feel inclusive and inter-religious, and it will conscientise the adherents of the fact that the community is inter-religious related.

In a religious pluralistic society, the dictum of Hans Kung is true and needs to be strengthened, *the peace among nations depends on the peace among religions*, dialogue and collaboration among the religions strengthens the relationship and promotes peaceful co-existence (Knitter, 2011). If the crises among nations and ethnicities have a religious cause, then the solution should be from religion. Tillich puts it that *religion should be used in fighting religion*, but much more now that it has to be done inter-religiously (Knitter, 2011). The assertion of Knitter is worth affirming that, if religions are not found to be part of the solution to the problem of crises between nations, they definitely will continue to exist as part of the problem. Malte C. Boecker (2007) points out that one of the temptations that make mutual respect very difficult among adherents of the religions is the teaching about other religious traditions as false or delusory and incomplete or distorted. He argues for religious resources for a theology of difference, where he affirms that Christian religious beliefs promote respect for others in the need to welcome and treat strangers with respect and kindness. This is also the case in the teaching of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where a neighbour could mean anyone outside one's faith. Already Knitter (2011) has made a point regarding the need for doing theology with the consciousness of others from other religions. He noted that to experience being a Christian inter-religiously requires the reflection of Christian theologians in affirming the following needs of other religions in the task of doing theology: the need for religious others in order to know and understand one's own particularity; to be able to understand God's universality; and building the reign or Kingdom of God. There is a need for a development of theologies¹⁷ that are designed to promote reconciliation and a true sense of community towards inter-religious understanding and peaceful co-existence in Northern Nigeria.

Inter-religious understanding leads to proper religious tolerance and respect for one another's religious beliefs and practices. In one of his famous quotes,¹⁸ Miroslav Volf (2001:1) states: "I don't think we need to agree with anyone in order to love the person. The command for Christians to love the other person, to be benevolent and beneficent toward them, is independent of what the other believes." Inter-religiously, love entails respect for one's or group's conviction, this I will describe as inter-religious love. This love will promote inter-religious functional coexistence among the religious groups. Again, in his reflection on the experience of the post September 11 of the World Trade Centre, Volf (2011) identified what he described as debit and credit in the American moral accounts which could be thought provoking to Christian/Muslim relationship in Northern Nigeria. He described the debit side of American moral account in the context of exceptionalism as thus: "In an inter-connected and inter-dependent world we insist on going our own way. We

17 This is noted by Meiring (2003:405), as reflected in the final report of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) from the contribution of the religious faith communities.

18 See BrainyQuote, *Miroslav Volf Quotes*, Viewed from <http://bit.ly/32NBKXX> [Accessed 19 March 2017].

don't hold ourselves accountable to the norms we hold others accountable to—the moral principle of reciprocity enshrined in the Golden Rule does not apply to us. As a result, we are less liked abroad than ever, and in some parts of the world we have come to be despised as bullying hypocrites" (Volf, 2011:1). On the credit side, Volf affirms the efforts of some Christian leaders who are involved in the promotion of civility and inter-religious understanding among the religious groups. According to Volf (2011:1), the conviction of such Christian leaders is the belief that, "the better Christian you are, the more truthful, just, and loving toward others, including Muslims, you will be." The lesson in Volf's reflection from the post September 11 American experience can be learned by the Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

As inter-religious dialogue is often considered as a reconciliation tool among the religious groups in Northern Nigeria, the challenges often faced are the misuse of dialogue, fundamentalism, and government laxity. In assessing the praxis of the reconciliation among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, the research indicates a lack of proper processes undertaken by the peace brokers which ultimately result in the failure of reconciliation and thereby the persistence of inter-religious crisis and dysfunctional exclusion. This happened when the offenders and victims are not allowed to pass through the reconciliation processes, as a result, the offenders feel protected and the victims suffer the pains. A pastoral care approach to inter-religious challenges through inter-religious understanding is capable of bringing healing and reconciliation among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria.

Finally, in support of the efforts of Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa of the Interfaith Mediation Centre (North-western Nigeria); the Da'wah Institute of Nigeria of the Islamic Education Trust (North-central Nigeria); the Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of the Jos Interfaith Centre (North-central Nigeria); and Rev. Kallah of his nonviolence approach to peace and dialogue engagement (North-eastern Nigeria), I recommend inter-religious learning among the religious groups in Northern Nigeria. It should be made a subject of learning at the grassroots level at public and private schools (primary and secondary) and be made a general course of study at tertiary institutions. Inter-religious hospitality and multi-religious prayer should be encouraged among the religious groups to aid inter-religious understanding and cooperation in the community. Secondly, in the event of inter-religious conflict requiring healing and reconciliation, proper pastoral care hermeneutical processes should be taken into consideration as explained by Clinebell and Thesnaar. And lastly, the Christian/Muslim inter-religious life in public and private sectors should be supported and encouraged by the authorities through ensuring that people are treated inter-religiously.

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